

South Dakota National Guard

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SD Guard Soldiers support troops in Afghanistan, bolster economic growth

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan – For one of the smallest South Dakota Army National Guard units to deploy since the nearly 12-year-long war in Afghanistan began, four Soldiers from the 1978th Contingency Contracting Team have a big mission.

The unit is responsible for assisting with the development and administration of contracting support plans and policy in support of U.S. and coalition forces throughout Afghanistan.

“We conduct proactive, responsive and effects-based contracting within our task force’s area of responsibility through the acquisition of vital support services and minor construction projects for coalition and Afghan forces,” said Maj. Matthew Symonds, 1978th commander. “Our efforts help to bolster Afghan economic growth towards an independent and sustainable economy while supporting the task force’s joint-security mission.”

According to Symonds, contracting efforts directly impact daily life-support functions such as private security for bases, dining facility operations, trash and waste removal, latrine and laundry services and heavy equipment rentals and operators, to name a few.

“Contracting and managing these services impacts every aspect of the military. We have a large impact on everything from life support to quality of life,” he said. “We have administered contracts in excess of \$900 million down to \$9 million worth of services and commodities during our deployment.”

The Rapid City-based 1978th deployed last November and also includes Capt. Paula Moore, Sgt. 1st Class Jack Hahne and Staff Sgt. Amanda Galdo. Working out of regional contracting offices throughout eastern and southern Afghanistan, the Soldiers are stationed separately at Camp Leatherneck (Helmand Province), Camp Phoenix (Kabul Province) and Forward Operating Bases Shank (Logar Province) and Salerno (Khowst Province). The contracts they oversee support tens of thousands of troops.

“Capt. Moore and I assists with the operational contracting support to more than 35,000 coalition forces in numerous forward operational bases, which are engaged in combat operations against insurgent forces,” said Symonds, the contracting officer at the Deputy Regional Contracting Center at Camp Leatherneck. “We assist with the acquisition, planning, development, and subsequent award and administration of over \$500 million annually in support of United States Forces Afghanistan Campaign Plan – ensuring contracting officers execute valid, legally enforceable documents, prepared in full compliance with federal procurement regulations and directives.”

Some of the major commands the 1978th supports include the 101st Airborne Division, II Marine Expeditionary Unit, several brigade combat teams, U.S. Special Forces, Afghan National Army, Police and Border Patrol forces, as well as coalition forces from Romania, Jordan, Czechoslovakia and Georgia.

Symonds said their responsibilities include the purchase of the day-to-day services and commodities that are needed for a forward operating base or combat outpost to be functional. The team also trains field ordering officers, contracting officer representatives and paying agents who help to administer and oversee the contracts throughout their areas of operation.

The team also advises mission commanders from the U.S. Army and coalition forces on acquisition strategies, resource availability and fiscal responsibility.

“We help commanders make smart business decisions on spending the taxpayers’ money,” said Symonds. “In essence we teach them how to get the most bang for the buck.”

These contracts are also having a significant impact on Afghanistan’s local economies. Whether local Afghan companies or businesses are awarded contracts for providing laborers, security, cultural advisors, road repair, trucking services, non-tactical vehicles leases or construction services, all them help to employ local Afghans and support economic growth.

“The contracts support the local population by providing jobs, and buying from local vendors help support the local infrastructure,” said Symonds.

While many of the contracts help to support the Afghan economy and work force, Symonds said his duties bring him into contact with many local Afghans.

“The local Afghan people we have worked with have been well adapted to conducting business with the government,” said Symonds. “It has been a good experience and I have learned many new customs. It has been an interesting, rewarding and challenging experience.

“Working and contracting with local nationals definitely requires one to be patient and open minded. There are many challenges we face; differences in workmanship, language and cultural differences, work ethic, security issues, etc.,” he continued. “We definitely put our critical thinking skills to the test and we often have to get creative to get the mission accomplished.”

But despite the challenges, Symonds enjoys the mission.

“We have truly enjoyed working in the joint environment providing support for all branches of the U.S. military,” he said. “Working from forward operating bases, we get to directly see the impact we make on a daily basis.”

While the 1978th Soldiers are expected to return home from duty in September, the leader of this small unit said this deployment experience has already made a big impact on him.

“We have been able to go to some remote areas on several occasions – allowing us to see different parts of Afghanistan – and meet different people and see how others are experiencing life in Afghanistan,” said Symonds. “We have had the opportunity to work closely with coalition forces and the Afghans. The experience definitely gives you a different perspective on what is really important in life. The opportunities and experiences I have gained here have certainly been rewarding.”



DSCF1403: Staff Sgt. Amanda Galdo, front row, second from right, of the 1978th Contingency Contact Team, South Dakota Army National Guard, poses with other members from her regional contracting team while in Afghanistan on March 30, 2013. (Courtesy photo)



DSCF1401: Capt. Paula Moore, center, of the 1978th Contingency Contact Team, South Dakota Army National Guard, listens to two Afghan men discuss details of a construction project while in Afghanistan on April 1, 2013. (Courtesy photo)



DSCF1402: Maj. Matt Symonds, right, commander of the 1978th Contingency Contact Team, South Dakota Army National Guard, with unidentified man at Camp Leatherneck in Helmond Province, Afghanistan, on April 22, 2013. (Courtesy photo)

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